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CENTURY OF SWEETS

Brooklyn teen hopes to sell 1,000 boxes during 100th anniversary of Girl Scout Cookie sales. 2

GETTY IMAGES

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1. What did New Yorkers see in the sky on Dec. 13 that caused some to become alarmed?

2. How many turnovers has the Giants' Week 16 opponent Philadelphia caused?

3. What restaurant did Drake and Jennifer Lopez have dinner at this week?

3 things you need to know

GERMAN POLICE HUNT ASYLUM-SEEKER OVER MARKET ATTACK

German police are looking for an asylum-seeker from Tunisia after finding an identity document under the driver's seat of a truck that plowed into a Berlin Christmas market and killed 12 people, officials and security sources said on Wednesday. The federal prosecutor's office offered a reward of up to $104,000 for information leading to the capture of the suspect, whom it identified as 24-year-old Anis Amri. "Beware: He could be violent and armed!" the prosecutor's office said in a statement, in which it described Amri as 5-foot-8, with black hair and brown eyes. Amri's father and security sources told Tunisia's Radio Mosaique that he had left Tunisia seven years ago as an illegal immigrant and had spent time in prison in Italy. REUTERS

US SAYS 6.4M SIGNED UP FOR OBAMACARE FROM NOV. 1 TO DEC. 19

2 Roughly 6.4 million consumers signed up for Obamacare insurance on Healthcare.gov from Nov. 1 to Dec. 19 indicating "clear demand for quality, affordable coverage," the U.S. government said on Wednesday. The number of people signing up for Jan. 1, 2017, coverage during this period represents an increase of 400,000 compared with the same period a year ago, the government said. Total plan selections through the extended deadline of Dec. 19 include 2.05 million new consumers and 4.31 million returning consumers actively renewing their coverage. HealthCare.gov sells plans for 39 states while the other states run their own exchanges. REUTERS

FACEBOOK: GOVERNMENT REQUESTS FOR ACCOUNT DATA RISE 27 PERCENT

3 Facebook Inc. said on Wednesday that government requests for user account data rose 27 percent in the first half of 2016 compared to the second half of last year, with U.S. law enforcement agencies topping the list. Government requests for account data globally rose to 59,229 from 46,710 and more than half contained a non-disclosure order that prohibited the social networking website from notifying users. Requests for content restriction, the number of items restricted for violating local laws, decreased by 83 percent from the second half of 2015, Facebook said in a blog post. The Paris attacks in November last year elevated the number of content restriction requests. REUTERS

Which cookie is your favorite?

In this 100th year of Girl Scout cookie sales, Metro would like to know which is your favorite among the many varieties. Cast your vote in the Metro poll at **Metro.us/girl-scout-cookies**

Jeovanna DeShong Carter plans to crush the competition with her goal of 1,000 boxes. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF GIRL SCOUTS OF GREATER NEW YORK

NYC teen aims high during 100th year of Girl Scout Cookies

Girl Scout Cookie season is underway and ends Jan. 22; online sales run from Jan. 3 to April 15.

AMANDA MIKELBERG
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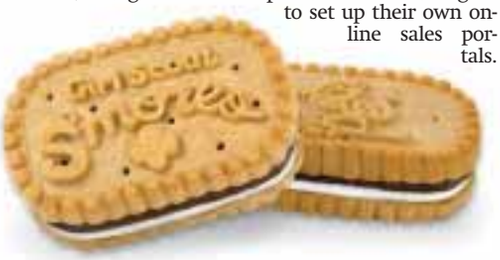
To honor the 100th anniversary of the Girl Scout Cookie, one of the country's top cookie sellers has set her sales goal at 1,000 boxes — crushing her 2014 record of over 700 boxes.

"My entire living room gets flooded with Girl Scout Cookies. I put little thank you notes on each box," 15-year-old Jeovanna DeShong-Conner told Metro. "You have to be organized. You have to be networking — finding connections for people who are want to take the [order forms] to their jobs."

The Brooklyn teen gets her foot in the door early where people tend to gather and are in charitable moods, such as her godmother's church choir rehearsal. She also engages in passive promotion by simply wearing her Girl Scout sweatshirt to school in at Poly Prep Country Day School in Bay Ridge.

"A lot of people want to buy cookies just from that," she said.

The century-old tradition to raise money for the troop activities and supplies began in 1917 with their first recorded bake sale, just five years after the first meeting of the Girl Guide troop in Savannah, Georgia.



Operation cookie went coast-to-coast in 1937, contracting bakers from around the country to produce for the Girl Scout Cookie boxed brand.

Now only two bakers share the cookie production — both coming up with their own version of the new S'mores cookie for 2017.

In 2015, the Girl Scouts of America made $800 million in cookie sales. Scouts sold 1.274 million boxes of cookies in the Greater New York area alone, said Meridith Maskara, who runs the cookie program as chief operating officer of Girl Scouts of New York. She added that Samoas and Thin Mints remain all-time favorites.

A big driver is the two-year-old Digital Cookie platform that allows girls to set up their own online sales portals.

"These girls learn the language of business, and by the time they are in high school, or when they go for that first job they have an advantage over other applicants. They don't have to be trained in customer service — they already have those people skills, money skills, business ethics," Maskara said.

"The girls on the executive committee are the brightest and have original methods, like scheduling appointments to do a sales pitch to a board room, and sell very confidently to the people who would make some of us adults pass out," she said.

DeShong-Connor is a member of that Executive Cookie Committee, a roundtable of the country's top saleswomen. She said her intention this year goes beyond moving cookies to focus more on the girls behind the boxes.

Together with another committee member, DeShong-Conner wants to initiate the Growing Up In Cookies program, which focuses on the transition from sales as a Brownie (grades 2-3) to Cadets (grades 6-8).

"It's easy to sell as a little girl because all you have to do is look cute and smile. For me the change that comes from being a younger Girl Scout to an older Junior was a little different," she said.

"At 13, girls are already a little insecure, maybe their friends don't think it's cool, and that's where we see lower sales. That's something we can target."

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Gowanus climbs expensive homes list

New luxury developments sales bolster some and sink others.

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@MetroNewYork
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ALL IMAGES COURTESY ISTOCK

At this year's end, the median sales price of homes in Gowanus rose by 68 percent — the largest gain of any area on the list.

Gowanus doesn't welcome bargain hunters anymore, it seems.

The up-and-coming Brooklyn neighborhood, where the local canal remains a superfund site, has rocketed to spot 14 of the city's 50 most expensive neighborhoods, according to Property Shark's final quarterly report for 2016.

At this year's end, the median sales price of homes in Gowanus rose by 68 percent — the largest gain of any area on the list.

Tribeca is still the mecca of New York's most moneyed homebuyers.

The celebrity-packed (Taylor Swift, Jon Stewart) Tribeca showed consistent growth this year, surpassing the median sales price of $4 million in this year's final quarter, the report states. Not too far away is Soho, also holding its position in second place, with a median sales price of $3.5 million.

"Twenty years ago I did a research study on why Tribeca and SoHo are always at the top of the list," real estate consultant Jonathan Miller told Metro, explaining that it's the uniformity in large sizes of the apartments that consistently fetch high prices.

"Unlike the Upper East Side, where you can have a 250-square-foot tenement walk-up, and a 7,500-square-foot prewar on the same block, the property types are largely fixed," Miller said. "There's pretty much three sizes, small, medium and large, because there are only so many ways you can cut up a loft building."

The quarter-to-quarter report can spot dramatic changes: Some neighborhoods hung tight to their positions in the top ten, while others made quantum leaps in in the third quarter. For instance, NoHo, which had ranked a lofty third place in the previous quarter, didn't even make it to the top 50 on this list.

"The reason for the change from the last analysis were a lot of high end new development closings, so that wave of closings has passed," Miller said.

DUMBO, one of only two non-Manhattan neighborhoods in the top 10, dropped only one spot, from fourth to fifth place, as realtors indicated that sales for the luxury development at 1 John Street that had sold 30 units at no less than $2.2 million, had fewer units to sell this round.

Forest Hills Gardens, the upscale Queens suburb, is other outer borough neighborhood that landed in the top ten, moving up one spot from last quarter to tenth on the list. President-elect Donald Trump's boyhood haunts, "dotted with Tudor-style homes came in 10th with a 37 percent increase in median home prices year-over-year," Property Shark noted. The median sales hit $1.25M, and 29 properties sold in 2016.

For the expanded version, visit metro.us

NYPD: Suspect in $1.6M gold-flakes theft thought to be in the Golden State

The man who nabbed $1.6 million worth of gold flakes from the back of an armored truck in Midtown may be in California, the NYPD said.

Police identified the suspect as 53-year-old Julio Nivelo on Tuesday. Nivelo, who also goes by the name David Vargas, is believed to be in the Los Angeles area.

In surveillance video released last month, Nivelo is seen scoping out the area behind an unattended Loomis armored truck and calmly walking away with the 86-pound bucket of gold flakes, authorities said.

Julio Nivelo, who also goes by the name David Vargas, has been identified as the robbery suspect. **NYPD**

The incident, which went down in a matter of seconds, took place on West 48th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues on Sept. 29.

Additional footage showed Nivelo quickly making his way down the crowded sidewalk along Fifth Avenue and even setting the bucket down to catch his breath. Soon after, he reportedly got into a van at 49th Street and Third Avenue.

Police believe that Nivelo wasn't just in the right place at the right time.

"Now that we know who he is, he's well organized," NYPD Detective Martin Pastor told the New York Daily News. "He is, I would say, a professional burglar, a professional thief."

Pastor said that Nivelo was deported to Ecuador four times between1994 and 2008.

Loomis is offering a $100,000 reward for information that would lead to Nivelo's arrest.

NIKKI M. MASCALI

BRIEF

Police: Queens Chase bank bandit strikes again

The Chase bank bandit has struck again.

For the fifth time in three months, the same suspect has successfully robbed a Chase bank branch in Queens, the NYPD said.

The latest incident happened on Monday, when the suspect walked into a Glendale Chase branch at 71-04 Woodhaven Boulevard, at 3 p.m. He approached a bank teller, passed a note demanding money, and was given an undetermined amount of cash, authorities said.

From Sept. 30 to Dec. 14, the same man robbed four Queens Chasebranches — two in Jamaica and two in Flushing — each time getting away with cash. In total, he stole $12,720, not including the latest incident, authorities said.

Police have released an updated photo of the suspect from the bank surveillance camera. He is described as about 35 years old, 6 foot 5 to 6 foot 7, and weighing about 200 pounds. He was last seen wearing a black waist length jacket, blue jeans and black sneakers.

Anyone with information should call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 800-577-8477, or for Spanish 888-577-4782. Tips can also be submitted at the Crime Stoppers website atnypdcrimestoppers.com or by texting to 274637, then entering TIP57. All calls are confidential.

Over the past few months, several would-be bank robbers have each hit multiple branches and different banks in Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. All of the suspects employ the same technique of passing a note demanding money, but on most occasions, the bank employee simply walks away or refuses to hand over money. **ALEXI FRIEDMAN**

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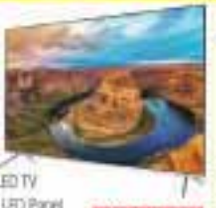

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Mystery investor buys Trump's childhood home in Queens to flip at auction

The home could fetch up to 10 times its most recent asking price.

6sqft

Hoping to cash in on Trumpmania, an anonymous New York investor scooped up the president-elect's childhood home in Jamaica Estates, Queens, in the hopes of bringing it to auction next month and turning a profit. Mansion Global got the news from auctioneers Paramount Realty USA, who say the bidding will take place on Jan. 17. Previous reports have estimated that the six-bedroom, Tudor-style home that Trump's father Fred built could fetch up to 10 times its most recent $1.2 million ask, or a whopping $10 million.

Donald Trump's childhood home in Jamaica, Queens. LAFFEY REALTY

The home at 85-15 Wareham Place first hit the market in July for $1.65 million when its owners, restaurateurs Isaac and Claudia Kestenberg, decided to list it amidst their divorce. They chopped the price to $1.2 million, then took it off the market, and finally began auction discussions with Paramount, ultimately calling it off in mid-October in hopes of garnering more interest. The mystery investor reportedly closed on the property earlier this month, and he must have offered the pair a nice sum for them to forego the auction themselves.

As 6sqft previously reported, the residence "is listed as [Trump's] address on his 1946 birth certificate (he was born at nearby Jamaica Hospital)" and he "lived in the house until his father Fred built a larger house nearby on Midland Parkway" sometime around 1950. It takes up 2,000 square feet and has a nice fireplace in the living room, a formal dining room, screened-in patio, mahogany floors, a finished basement with a bedroom and full bath, and a five-car driveway leading to a two-car detached garage.

Major NYC broker Dolly Lenz said recently, "The house has at least tripled in value if not 10 times in value …Now that he's [president-elect], it's worth a lot more. It's a huge deal. And there are lots of wealthy people who buy trophy homes as one-offs. Think of all the billionaires who could turn this into a museum."

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New Yorkers were unnerved by the low-flying military plane circling Manhattan last week. @718BK/TWITTER

Mystery plane was Trump evacuation drill: Report

"What's transpired in New York City over the last 15 years, we need to know ..." NYPD Commissioner James O'Neill said.

KIMBERLY AQUILINA
@KimESTAqui
kimberly.aquilina@metro.us

A low-flying military airplane and two helicopters last week gave New Yorkers a post-9/11 fright, but it was only a President-elect Donald Trump "emergency relocation" exercise, according to a news report.

A C-130 aircraft and two HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters flew in circles in a no-fly zone over Manhattan on Dec. 13 without any warning.

The FAA reportedly didn't have much to say at the time calling the military plane part of "authorized flights… in coordination with air traffic control," but an ABC correspondent tweeted that the C-130 was just completing "standard military training," per his source.

The flyovers were part of an "emergency relocation drill," during which the military scouted locations — mainly in Central Park — where a helicopter could land in case Trump needs to be evacuated from his home in Trump Tower, DNAinfo reported.

"[The military] were making plans how to remove him, mapping plans and strategizing," a source told the website.

At the time, the NYPD said it didn't know anything about the aircrafts, but has since said it was given short notice and was not told how big the plane would be.

"Usually when there is a flyover, we get something through our operations unit. It's sent out to everybody," NYPD Commissioner James O'Neill said last Wednesday, according to DNAinfo.

"That notification is supposed to go out through OEM [the Office of Emergency Management], so I know OEM is working with the military to make sure the proper notifications are made. [OEM Commissioner] Joe Esposito is going to have to make sure he stays in contact with the military for future notifications."

"The public should know about that. What's transpired in New York City over the last 15 years, we need to know that," he added.

The NYPD referred Metro to the U.S. Secret Service for any information. The Secret Service did not immediately respond to calls made by Metro.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo GETTY IMAGES

New York issues insurance rule to ease burdens on hiring ex-convicts

The regulation, the first of its kind in the United States, will help New York businesses obtain so-called commercial crime insurance when hiring employees with criminal records.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Wednesday issued a regulation making it easier for businesses to hire former convicts by prohibiting insurance companies from refusing coverage for crime-related losses caused by employees.

Commercial crime coverage, a standard type of business insurance, generally kicks in when companies sustain losses in situations that involve employee dishonesty, such as forgery, theft of a customer's property, or fraudulent transfer of funds through a company's computer.

Many insurers, however, typically view ex-convicts as too high a risk. That means New York businesses wanting to hire someone with a criminal record are often denied the coverage, said New York Department of Financial Services Superintendent Maria Vullo in a statement.

That practice has discouraged the state's businesses from hiring former convicts, Vullo said, despite their skills, and creates an "unfair barrier" to employment for the 2.3 million New Yorkers with criminal records.

New York's Department of Financial Services regulates banks and insurers that do business in the state.

The new regulation, effective July 1, 2017, allows businesses to obtain the coverage as long as they consider a set of factors in a New York law that applies to hiring people who have criminal convictions.

Businesses must consider, for example, whether a prior criminal offense is related to duties an employee will perform and the time that has passed since the conviction, among other factors, according to the rule. REUTERS

BRIEF

Maine voters pass measure legalizing marijuana use

Maine voters have made the state the eighth in the United States to legalize the recreational use of marijuana, state officials said on Wednesday, following a recount of votes on a ballot initiative.

The measure passed by 3,995 votes with the support of 381,768 people, Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap said in a statement. That was a slightly narrower margin of victory than the 4,073 vote gap reported following the Nov. 8 election.

The measure now goes to Gov. Paul LePage, who has 10 days under Maine law to issue a proclamation of the vote results. It would take effect 30 days later, setting the stage for the drug to become legal for adults over 21 beginning late next month.

The result makes Maine the second state in the northeast to legalize recreational use of the drug, as voters in nearby Massachusetts approved a similar measure last month. Marijuana became legal to use and posses in limited quantities, but not yet to buy, in that state last week.

LePage, a Republican, said earlier this week during a radio interview that he intended to seek legal advice before signing the proclamation, since the drug remains illegal under federal law.

President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has sent mixed signals about his views on it.

During the campaign, Trump, a Republican, said that marijuana legalization was best left to the states. His pick for attorney general, U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, has criticized President Barack Obama's administration for not enforcing the federal ban aggressively enough. REUTERS

University launches tool to show how fake news spreads

News and tech companies are trying to tackle fake news and have formed a coalition to improve the quality of information on social media.

GETTY IMAGES

Researchers at Indiana University have developed a new tool that shows how fake news and unverified stories spread through social media.

The search engine, dubbed Hoaxy, is the latest effort to combat the proliferation of fake news, which proliferated during the presidential campaign, with one bogus post-Election Day story sparking a real-life event when a gunman fired shots into a Washington, D.C., restaurant.

"It is a very serious problem," said Filippo Menczer, the director of the university's Center for Complex Networks and Systems Research, which launched Hoaxy.

Misinformation and propaganda are not new, but Menczer said social media has added a new component because the information is pre-selected to be in line with people's own opinions.

"Social media makes it more likely that I am more exposed to false information that I am likely to believe," he added.

Hoaxy does not determine whether a story is real but it shows how it is spread online and shows related fact-checking.

"There is no editorial judgment."

Menczer

The free website, Hoaxy.iuni.iu.edu, can be used by reporters, researchers and the public. If a user suspects a story is false they can search it in the website to see how it was spread and to what degree it went viral.

"There is no editorial judgment," Menczer said in an interview. "We don't look at the claims, or vet them, or say they are true or false."

It examines websites, compiled by news organizations and fact-checking sites, that are known to post satire, hoaxes or conspiracy theories. It also tracks links to the stories on Twitter and Facebook so users can see how often the stories have been shared.

"You can observe who are the hubs, who are the main spreaders and most influential who have spread these claims and fact-checks," said Menczer.

Menczer said he started looking into the phenomenon of false news in a research experiment several years ago. He created a website with celebrity stories clearly marked as fake and promoted them on social bookmarking websites that were popular at the time. REUTERS

NC legislature debates repeal of transgender bathroom law

GETTY IMAGES

North Carolina's Senate Republicans on Wednesday proposed repealing the state's law restricting transgender restroom access, but outraged the law's opponents by adding a provision to temporarily ban cities from passing measures to support transgender rights.

The legislation filed by Senate President Phil Berger followed hours of closed-doors talks among Republicans, who met in a special session to consider scrapping the law that has put North Carolina at the center of America's debate over transgender rights.

The state in March became the first to bar transgender people from using public restrooms that match their gender identity, citing traditional values and a need for public safety. Opponents called it mean-spirited and unnecessary.

National backlash was swift and fierce, leading to boycotts that were blamed for millions of dollars in economic losses for North Carolina, as major sporting events such as the National Basketball Association All-Star Game were moved out of state.

The pushback was widely cited as the reason Republican Gov. Pat McCrory lost his re-election bid in November to Democrat Roy Cooper, who called for the repeal of the law known as House Bill 2, or HB 2.

But action was delayed in both legislative chambers on Wednesday, creating an air of uncertainty. REUTERS

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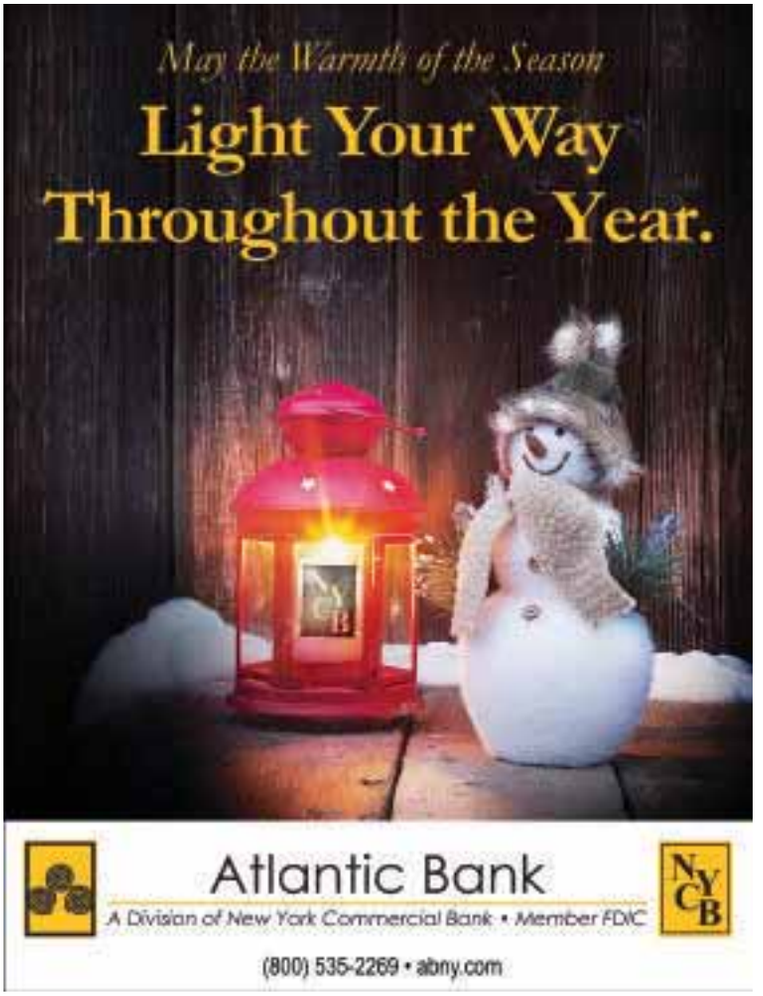
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Cause of deadly Mexico fireworks blasts still unknown

Forty-six of the injured remain hospitalized, while 18 of the dead have yet to be identified due to the severe nature of their burns, said state Interior Minister Jose Manzur.

Forensic investigators scoured the charred remains of a fireworks market outside Mexico City on Wednesday for clues to what caused a series of massive blasts that killed at least 32 people, the third fiery accident there in 11 years.

Dozens of people were injured in Tuesday's disaster at the San Pablito open-air market, which was crowded with shoppers just before Christmas.

A smell of burning hung over the remains of the market where investigators dressed in white protective gear, police and medical personnel searched through twisted metal frames and the wreckage of stalls. Soldiers with dogs appeared to be looking for human remains.

Alejandro Gomez, the state attorney general, told Mexican television it was unclear what caused the explosions, adding he could not corroborate accounts pointing to a detonation at one stall that may have begun a chain reaction.

Video of the blasts showed a spectacular flurry of pyrotechnics exploding high into the sky, like rockets in a war zone, as a massive plume of charcoal-gray smoke billowed out from the site.

"The only thing you could do was run."
Alberto Teres

The federal attorney general's office opened an investigation, saying that there were six separate blasts.

Alberto Teres, owner of one of few stalls remaining, saw the flames leap from stall to stall. "The only thing you could do was run," he said.

A dozen people are still missing, Gomez said.

REUTERS

A massive explosion guts Mexico's biggest fireworks market in Tultepec, Mexico. ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

A soldier and search dog inspect the disaster site in Tultepec, Mexico.

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WEEK 47 12/19-12/25

FORMAN MILLS

President Obama nets his second namesake fish

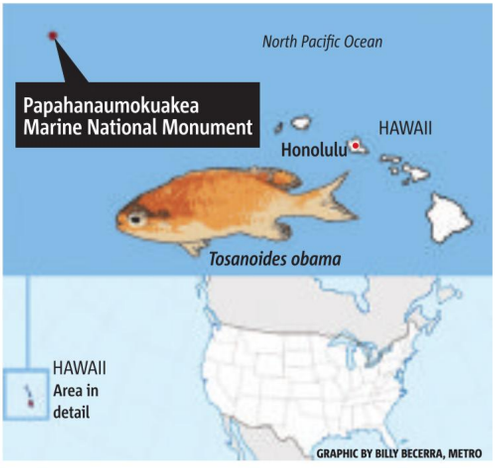
President Barack Obama may see his Affordable Care Act scaled back or repealed after he leaves office next month, but there will always be the lasting legacy of the Obama fish.

The newly discovered species was found in the coral reefs of Northwestern Hawaii.

Marine biologist Richard Pyle has named a new species of fish he found in June while scuba diving in Hawaii after the outgoing president. The president was born in Honolulu.

The tiny fish, Tosanoides obama, was found near the Kure Atoll in the Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument in Northwestern Hawaii.

The pinkish basslet fish has a blue spot on its dorsal fin and is the only known fish that calls the Papahanaumokuakea home. In fact, only five have been seen by scientists since their discovery six months ago.



It's fitting Pyle named the fish after the president.

In August, Obama quadrupled the size of the marine region that was developed by President George W. Bush in 2006. Now at 582,578 square miles, it is the largest protected area on Earth, with bans on commercial fishing and other activities within it.

This isn't the first foray into the animal kingdom for Obama's name — or even his first fish. He also has a namesake spider, parasitic worm and extinct lizard.

His first fish, a freshwater darter indigenous to eastern North American, was named after him in 2012 when it and four other darter species were discovered. The others were named after former Vice President Al Gore and former Presidents Jimmy Carter, Theodore Roosevelt and Bill Clinton.

The only question that remains is if President-elect Donald Trump will seek to repeal the Obama fish when he takes office next month. NIKKI M. MASCALI

Stonehenge winter solstice

More than five thousand pagans, druids and revelers gathered at Britain's ancient Stonehenge monument on Wednesday to celebrate the winter solstice. The sun rose at the site of the famed standing stones in the southwest English county of Wiltshire at 1:09 p.m. Eastern time, beginning the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. People played musical instruments, while others sang and took photographs of the rising sun which will provide just under eight hours of sunlight on Wednesday, said English Heritage, which protects the historical site. Thursday marks the start of longer days before the summer solstice in June. "I am from South Africa, I came for the solstice, especially for the solstice. I am a pagan, a witch and this is about the best place to be," one woman said. REUTERS

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Our theories about J. Lo and Drake

The latest piece of gossip from the rumor mill is that Jennifer Lopez and rapper Drake are dating. According to "Entertainment Tonight," they had dinner together at the West Hollywood restaurant Delilah on Monday evening, and last week Drake posted a selfie of the pair with a heart-eye emoji underneath it. This is the kind of rumor that should excite us — two huge celebs hooking up — but it just doesn't. This year has been taxing enough without having to wrap our heads around such an unlikely couple. So we're offering some alternative theories on what's going on. J. Lo is staging an elaborate Marc Anthony distraction. If you'll recall, J. Lo gave her ex-husband an onstage smooch at the Latin Grammys, and less than a week later Anthony and his wife announced their separation. J. Lo is clearly getting back with her ex but wants to avoid taking the blame for his divorce. Thinking quick on her feet she cozied up to the first unsuspecting, but eligible, bachelor to show up to her Las Vegas residency, Drake. Meanwhile, Champagne Papi still spends his nights writing texts to Rihanna that he never sends because she still hasn't responded to the one from a month ago. He thinks being spotted out with J. Lo will catch Rihanna's attention. He's wrong.

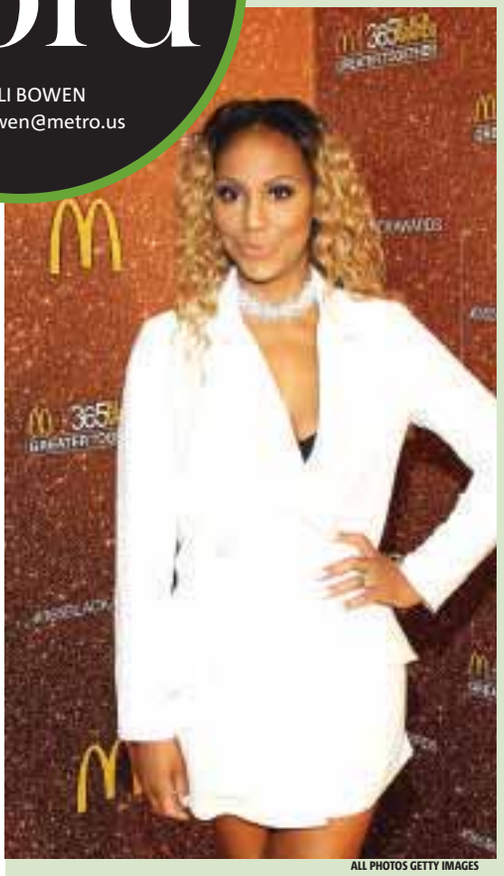
Heidi Klum makes falling look good

It's a known fact that supermodels often possess ballerinalike grace in order to master their body movements. Although Klum has added businesswoman, actress, host and designer to her résumé, Monday she proved she's still got those model bones. Since making her singing debut on "America's Got Talent Holiday Spectacular" by performing a rendition of "Santa Baby" with crooner contestant Sal Valentinetti, Klum has been making headlines for falling. The spin-gone-wrong didn't trip Klum up one bit and on second look, we're wondering if she really fell at all. Klum obviously wasn't mortified by her tumble. She posted a video clip of the performance on her Twitter account, capturing the whole incident. So was this a part of the act? I think there is a strong case to be made for this being a choreographed, twirl-to-the-ground move that went way over our heads.

Lena Dunham's at it, again

Lena Dunham enjoys the taste of her own foot in her mouth. Most recently, the 30-year-old writer, actress and self-proclaimed feminist had to apologize for a joke that she made about abortion, of all things. During the Dec. 14 episode of her Women of the Hour podcast, Dunham shared her experience visiting a Planned Parenthood in Texas. While there, Dunham felt compelled to make it clear that while she supported people's right to choose, she had never had an abortion herself. A closer examination of this position revealed to Lena, that she, too, had internalized stigma about abortion. Recalling this event Dunham changed her approach to the topic ended the podcast with, "Now I can say that I still haven't had an abortion, but I wish I had." Because abortion is one of the hardest decisions that people have to make, many found Dunham's conclusion to be insensitive. She issued a full apology on her Instagram account saying that her comment was "distasteful" and the result of a "delusional girl" persona that she uses. We kind of picked up on that.

Tamar Braxton shades 'The Real'



Tamar Braxton, her singing sisters and their mom visited the "T.D. Jakes Show" on Tuesday. The youngest Braxton sister was asked about "The Real," the talk show she co-hosted before an abrupt departure in May. The producers of the show releases a statement saying that the decision for Braxton to leave the show was mutual, but some cryptic Instagram posts and footage from her "Braxton Family Values" show imply she was fired. T.D. Jakes mentioned that the ratings for "The Real" have declined since Braxton left and she dramatically pretended to catch a "holy spirit" saying "Oh Lord, ain't that terrible. Lord Jesus … Save 'em Jesus. Resuscitate!" Translation: I'm actually unbothered by this news. In the caption to the video clip, which she posted on her Instagram, Braxton insists she wasn't being messy. But we know shade when we see it. You're not fooling us, honey. ***Check out the clip at metro.us***

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Cameron Dallas says selfies are here to stay

The social media sensation stars in Netflix's "Chasing Cameron."

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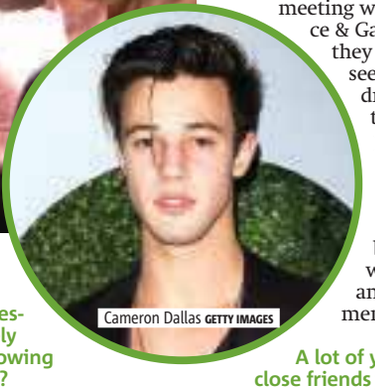
The docuseries "Chasing Cameron" airing Dec. 27, follows Dallas, second right, and his crew of fellow social media influencers on the MAGCON tour. NETFLIX



Cameron Dallas GETTY IMAGES

Cameron Dallas knows his way around the internet.

The 22-year-old social media star has millions of followers on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Vine (R.I.P.). Now he's trying his hand at more traditional media, starring and executive producing in "Chasing Cameron," a Netflix original docuseries, premiering Dec. 27.

The reality series will follow the young talent behind the scenes, as he navigates the drama and conflicts on the road with MAGCON, (Meet and Greet Convention) a touring fan fest starring his friends and fellow young social media influencers like Aaron Carpenter and Taylor Caniff.

We talk with the young star about his transition to more traditional media, his favorite social media platform and the future of the selfie.

Tell us about the opportunity to do the Netflix show and what drew you to it.
I have an 8 foot by 4 foot white board I write all my goals on. A year ago, I wrote that I wanted to have a show on Netflix because I wanted to help speed up the process of bridging the gap between social media and traditional media. [I also wanted to] educate people, because there's a really big generational gap between the millennials and basically everyone else as far as what social media is, what goes on, what's the power of it [and] how it's being used for brands. We're on the forefront and we're determining the space as we go.

What can your fan base learn about you from this show that they don't already know from obsessively following you?
Typically [for] fans, what they see is what I put out. What they're going to be able to see [on "Chasing Cameron"] is what goes on behind the scenes. What truly happens: all the drama between me and the guys and how we conflict and how we handle it, what we say on social media and who's being truthful and who's lying.

On top of that, I want to educate the older generation by showing them the business side, how much work truly goes into it.

How are you different from the self that you project online? Are there any aspects of you that might come through in the show?
They can see me stressed out trying to wrangle all these kids and run a business at the same time; flipping the switch between being a talent and being a business owner.

I'm still being me on social media, but at the same time, they don't see all of me on social media. They don't see me going on a business meeting with Dolce & Gabbana, they don't see the drama that happens between me and Taylor [Caniff] because we got in an argument.

A lot of your close friends you've met online and then in real life, via MAGCON. It seems like more and more people are meeting people online first.
It's the new generation. I feel like it's expected. I feel like that meme ["Slide into your DMs"] is turning into real life. Like, "I met your mom through Instagram DMs"; it's [now] true.

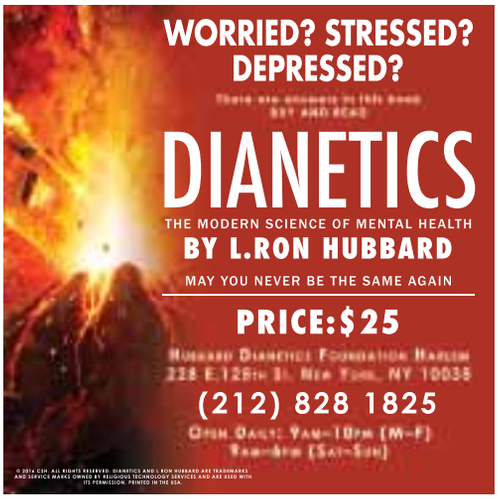
When you were younger did you have any reality shows that you watched, that you were a big fan of?
I was a huge fan of "Rob and Big." Rob Dyrdek is actually someone I look up to. He's a skateboarder. Early on in his career instead of taking short term money he would take equity in companies. He's really good overall about how he expands his business.

Do you have any social justice aspirations?
I ran a campaign for a foster charity. I raised $125,000 through the American Giving Awards, which was super exciting for me. I just did a thing where we raised money for people in Africa as far as building wells and things like that. I'm always looking for new ways to better the communities. I've done the Make a Wish Foundation, too.

Do you have a favorite social media channel?
Probably Instagram, because I started on it. I branded myself as a model, then I crossed over to Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, then Vine. Then I made a company, had my first meet and greet in New York and thousands of girls showed up. I was like, wow this is really something. So then I end up forming MAGCON and now I'm just continuing to work in fashion and these different industries.

MAGCON is almost like the boy bands of today.
We [the guys] are really close. We're kind of grouped together, but at the same time we have our own individual brands.

Do you feel like selfies are ever going to stop being a thing?
When I travel places I take selfies. I don't think so. People have always taken selfies throughout history. From Myspace until now.



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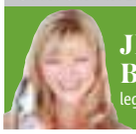
Looking back on a bumpy 2016

Geek Girl in Hollywood



JENNA BUSCH
legionofleia.com

It's been a challenging year to say the least. OK, fine — it totally sucked. Big time. I don't know about you, but I'm holding my breath until it's over. It's certainly been a wild year for entertainment. Let's take a look at some of the big moments of 2016:

Felicity Jones' Jyn Erso in "Rogue One" was one of the few great things to happen in 2016. JONATHAN OLLEY

Celebrity deaths

If there is anyone left, I think we should wrap them in fluffy blankets and put them in a bunker until Jan. 1. We've lost so many celebrities, from actors to musicians and comedians. Here's a tiny sampling: David Bowie, Prince, Alan Rickman, Garry Shandling, Doris Roberts, Anton Yelchin, Muhammad Ali, Garry Marshall, Florence Henderson, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Alan Thicke — I can't go on. I really don't know how the list compares to other years, but it certainly seems far longer than usual.

"SNL" revival

"Saturday Night Live" has had its ups and downs over the years, but this year it got back on point. The cast is great, the sketches are better (mostly), but its sendup of the farce that we called an election has been brilliant. Alec Baldwin's portrayal of Donald Trump is so dead-on that even the president-elect can't help but complain like a toddler about it on Twitter. Kate McKinnon has nailed her portrayals of both Kellyanne Conway and Hillary Clinton. If you didn't tear up during her version of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" (there's yet another celebrity this vile year has stolen from us), you have no heart.

Theater is back

Between "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child" and "Hamilton's" continued dominance, theater has seen a huge revival this year. Speaking of "Hamilton," the show got even more political this fall when one of the cast members told Vice President-elect Mike Pence at a performance he attended how important diversity and understanding are, in a very respectful address.

Superheroes are going strong

Remember all those stories about how there was no way to sustain the glut of superhero films and TV shows last year? (And the year before that, and the year before that …) Well, they were wrong. DC and Marvel both had two huge films, one of each featuring a battle between the good guys. People have different opinions about whose was more effective. Sadly, that dialogue often ended in threats and venom for those with a different view.

"Star Wars" continues to conquer

Speaking of venom, white supremacists decided to boycott "Rogue One" because it actually had women and people of color in it. Well, the weeny, whiny babies didn't exactly do any damage — the film blew away the competition at the box office. Whether or not you see a deeper meaning in the Rebel Alliance fighting the Empire or not, the franchise just added a pretty damn good chapter.

Yes, 2016 sucked, but at least there are a few things going for us. I didn't even mention the comfort the Obama/Biden memes have brought the world, or the way TV has reflected our feelings of impending doom. While 2017 may be even worse, as "Rogue One's" Jyn Erso said, "Rebellions are built on hope."

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7 Ways to ring in the new year things to do

ISTOCK

WHERE TO EAT, DRINK & PLAY

Good riddance, 2016.

KATE MOONEY
@yatinbrooklyn
kate.mooney@metro.us

1 The Greatest New Year's Party Ever! F— 2016!

Brooklyn Bazaar's celebration is all about catharsis. Instead of watching the ball drop, exorcise your 2016 angst by thrashing around in an actual ball pit. Write down your worst moment from 2016 and watch it explode in a midnight confetti bomb. Sweat out your bad vibes to DJ sets from Michael T, Dirtyfinger and Cousin Cole, or jump around until you're happy to indie-punk outfit Titus Andronicus, the surf-poppy High Waisted and high energy rockers Toys in Trouble. Complimentary midnight champagne toast.**$40-$80, bkbazaar.com**

2 The McKittrick Masquerade

If you pretend you're someone else for the final night of 2016, maybe you can forget this trying year ever happened. Don a mask, dress in red, black, white or gold, and surrender to a night of surprises at the hotel's bohemian soiree. Anything is possible at the home of "Sleep No More," the spooky, "Macbeth"-inspired interactive-theater production. Enjoy open bar, music and dancing; select packages include entry to "Sleep No More" and dinner at the hotel's restaurant, The Lodge. **$100-$385, mckittrickhotel.com**

3 New Year's Eve Singles Party

Hoping to meet someone special in 2017? Start at this singles-only celebration at The Stitch Lounge. The two-floor event space will fill with an expected 400 guests ready to mingle — with the help of an open bar, Top 40 DJ, photobooth and a Celebrity Couples icebreaker. **$65-$100 singleandthecity.com**

4 New Year's Eve at Westlight

A rooftop is a wonderful locale to spend New Year's eve, especially when it combines an open bar, fireworks and a view of the Manhattan skyline. That's what you're in for at the Westlight bar atop the William Vale, the newest addition to Williamsburg's boutique hotel scene. Enjoy dancing, hors d'oeuvres, speciality cocktails and a midnight champagne toast. **From $225, westlightnyc.com**

5 The New York Road Runners Midnight Run

Nothing like an endorphin boost to get your mind right before the new year. Thousands of runners in glittery attire will get a head start on their 2017 fitness goals with a four-mile midnight run around Central Park's inner loop, as fireworks shoot off above. Arrive at 10 p.m. for a pre-race dance party at Rumsey Playground; wind down at the finish line with live music and sparkling apple cider. If you're looking to quench your thirst with champagne, the adjacent Tavern on the Green is hosting ticketed pre- and post-run celebrations. **Race registration, free-$60; Tavern on the Green packages, $95-$150, nyrr.org**

6 Prohibition New Year's Eve

Forget it was ever 2016 at this party set in another era. East Williamsburg's The Graham hosts a time-traveling night of 1920s speakeasy vibes, with the help of bespoke cocktails, a live swing band and burlesque. Whether your retro look is steampunk or "The Great Gatsby," keep in mind, "it's a classy joint, see?"**$60, thegrahambrooklyn.com**

7 New Year's Eve with the Smiths

Wallow in your mopey feelings about the year with a night of Morrissey tunes, performed by tribute band The Sons & Heirs at Littlefield. Post-show, liven up at the '80s dance party Tainted Love, with tunes from DJ Jane Elizabeth. Midnight champagne toast is free; and if you'd rather wait until 2016 is officially over before you celebrate, entry after 1 a.m. is only $10. **$20-$25, littlefieldnyc.com**

CHRISTMAS EVE

Bring these delectable treats to Christmas dinner

EVA KIS

Ferrara Bakery and Cafe is a Little Italy institution, and also the only bakery in town that makes its own **panettone**. The Italian Christmas bread-cake is baked with a hint of lemon and studded with raisins and other dried fruits. ***$21.95, 195 Grand St.***

The Doughnut Plant's Holiday Ripple has taken on the flavors of Christmas, with a white chocolate-red velvet doughnut on the outside, a minty chocolate pudding-filled ring in the middle and a gingerbread center. ***$24, Chelsea Hotel, 220 W. 23rd St.***

Have some frustration to work out this holiday season? **Dominique Ansel Bakery's Peppermint Brittle** comes with a mini hammer to break open the buttercrunch toffee with crushed peppermint candies in a chocolate shell. ***$20, preorder online, 189 Spring St.***

There's a lot of new French energy in NYC, including at the classic bistro **Benoit.** Their revamped **Buche de Noel** is filled with soft candied fruit and ground almonds, surrounded by thick mousse and a sparkling crust of white chocolate. ***$38, order ahead, 60 W. 55th St.***

Grab an assortment of cookies like cardamom snickerdoodle and chocolate explosion from acclaimed new bakery **Mah-Ze-Dahr**, and cross off the last person on your list with a Cookie of the Month Subscription. ***$50, 28 Greenwich Ave.***

ALL IMAGES PROVIDED

The **macarons** inside Macy's new shop **Made by Pauline** brim with delicate flavors that make this treat taste special again in varieties like cassis and fig. Mention you saw them in Metro and get 15% off 12 ($33) through January. ***151 W. 34th St., Fine Jewelry Section***

Haunted mansion

Unlock the secrets of Morris-Jumel Mansion on a ghost hunting tour.

EVA KIS
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eva.kis@metro.us

Manhattan's oldest house doesn't come without some supernatural baggage.

That's been the experience of people who've come through Morris-Jumel Mansion in Washington Heights since the 1800s, and there's a bona fide paranormal expert on staff who leads bimonthly tours to commune with them.

Vincent Carbone, public programs and events manager at Morris-Jumel and lifelong ghost hunter. He's been involved in the science of paranormal phenomena since a young age — instead of shying away from his fear of the dark, he decided to find out what could be lurking in it.

"Ghost hunting has been a thing for hundreds of years, ever since mankind has started telling stories," he says. In the era when paranormal activity first began to be reported at the mansion, "it was often considered a mark of prominence to have a ghost in your house. 'I have a home so beautiful, they want to be there even when they're dead!'"

Eliza Jumel's bedroom; Vincent Carbone. EVA KIS

Built by the Morris family in 1765, the house is now best known as the residence of notorious Vice President Aaron Burr, though he only lived there for eight months. His wife Eliza Jumel, however, lived in the home from 1810 until her death at age 90 in 1865, and is one of the specters who has been spotted there.

Visitors and employees of the mansion have reported various incidents over the years: fingernails clicking on a pot in Eliza's room, doors in the basement opening and women laughing when there's nobody downstairs, a heavy table being moved, items shifting on the mantle. On the ghost hunts Carbone leads at the mansion, he uses equipment like an electromagnetic field detector (ghosts are believed to manipulate electricity), motion sensors and laser arrays to detect specters while leading the small group through a tour of the mansion. The most paranormal activity happens in Eliza's and Aaron's chambers, and the basement.

The energy of the house has proven useful in other ways. Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote parts of "Hamilton" in Burr's bedroom, and the newly published "Morris-Jumel Mansion Anthology of Fantasy and Paranormal Fiction" collects the work of 14 authors whose supernatural stories draw on the house's history. Carbone, who has a background in theater, has also written a site-specific play that was staged at Morris-Jumel — Eliza's ghost is especially fond of appearing during productions, as she was an actress.

His tours attract all kinds of people, but it's the nonbelievers he likes best. "I love skeptics, because when everyone believes in ghosts, it kind of takes the fun out of it," he says.

"The people who already believe come in here and think anything can be a ghost. [Skeptics] keep me on my toes; they keep me honest."

If you go

Paranormal Investigation
Feb. 11, 8-11 p.m.
Morris-Jumel Mansion
65 Jumel Terrace, Washington Heights
$30, morrisjumel.org

EAT LIKE AN INSIDER

The Irish know how to fortify against winter, so rolling up to the Lower East Side's modern Irish pub **The Late Late** (159 E. Houston St.) is a smart bet on the cold nights to come. For winter, head bartender Seth Allen used the bar's "Irish-inspired" philosophy to create a new menu of cocktails like the Sage Advice (tamarind-infused Cruzan rum, lime, burnt orange peel and a kiss of smoked sage). Guinness also appears in reductions and syrups — it's the sweetener in the house Old Fashioned — but also in surprising ways like the warm Minty Fresh with creme de menthe.

Allen shared some of his favorite spots when he's not busy experimenting with Ireland's signature beer.

Out-of-town guests

"**The Cannibal,** it's a craft beer and butcher shop. You can get some really amazing food like large-format steaks and bone marrow dishes, very meat-heavy. *113 E. 29th St.*

For a group

"**Queens Kickshaw** is great place for beer and cider and live music. It's out of the city center, and a nice walk to **The Strand Smokehouse** for barbecue and bluegrass." *40-17 and 25-27 Broadway, Astoria*

Under $10

"This Mexican place called **Downtown Bakery,** you can get two soft tacos or a giant burrito for $7 and it's authentic, amazing food, the guys are so nice there." *69 First Ave., East Village*

Date night

"**Syndicated,** it's a new theater in Brooklyn with really good food that you can order while watching movies — tickets are $3." *40 Bogart St., Bushwick* EVA KIS

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ARTS

Love Show Holiday Extravaganza

The holidays get extra steamy this year as "The Nutcracker: Rated R" returns for the first time since 2012. Not only do the kinky dancers show up for some decidedly naughty Christmas fun — plumbing our deepest holiday secrets, from family spats to boozy confessions — they'll also be doing numbers from the variety show "Yule Shul." The show blends burlesque, ballet, magic, circus art and more.
Dec. 22-23, 8 p.m., Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St., $10-$25, lpr.com

PARTY

Xmas Spectacular

If you can't visit mom this holiday season, you can at least visit the mothership. Celebrate in outer space with a themed Xmas Spectacular at Brooklyn's House of Yes. The party goes intergalactic with a cast of characters including Paindeer, a Santacize instructor, Misfit drag queens, lady baby Jesus and an alien Father Christmas. Early arrivals get drink specials and a surprise floor slow. **Dec. 22, 7 p.m., 2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn, $35-$50, houseofyes.org**

Speakeasy Moderne

There are two kinds of NYE revelers: those who go to bed after the ball drops and those who are just getting started. The latter should head uptown to the Triad for Speakeasy Moderne, a boozy party that will come to life just before midnight with cabaret performances, burlesque dancers, sultry singer Dina Fanai and DJs. Times Square festivities will be aired for the first half-hour, and then it's time to party straight into January. Jazz Age costumes and cocktail attire are encouraged. **Dec. 31, 11:30 p.m.-3 a.m., 158 W. 72nd St., $120-$149, thetriad.com**

FILM

'A Christmas Story'

"A Christmas Story" is mightily divisive — you either hate it or you love it so much you'll watch it for 24 hours straight, every single year, on Christmas Day. If you're in that latter camp, head to Videology for a special pre-Christmas screening complete with a complimentary glass of boozy Ovaltine and a Secret Santa gift supplied by a member of the staff. **Dec. 23, 7 p.m., 308 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, $23, videologybarandcinema.com**

MUSIC

A Darlene Love Christmas

From "He's A Rebel" to "A Fine, Fine Boy," Darlene Love's music is seared into our collective consciousness. But the hall-of-famer also carved a niche for herself as a Christmas singer with annual performances of "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)" on "David Letterman" from 1986 to 2015. Catch her live at one of three upcoming holiday concerts at B.B. King's in Times Square. **Dec. 23 & 26, Jan. 6, 237 W. 42nd St., $45-$495, bbkingblues.com**

HANNUKAH

Menorah Lighting Ceremony

For eight nights at Grand Army Plaza in Park Slope, they'll light the city's largest menorah at sundown. The monument stands at 32 feet (approximately the tallest allowed by Jewish law), and it's a spectacle each year as Rabbi Shimon Hecht rides a cherry picker to light the candles one by one. The holiday event, sponsored by Chabad in Brooklyn, includes live music, fresh latkes and small presents for young kids. Start times vary, so check the schedule. **Dec. 24, Brooklyn, free, chabadparkslope.com**

PARTY

Get Real

You're probably triple-booked on New Year's Eve, which is why Get Real makes life easy by hosting a pre-NYE party on Dec. 29. Like last year, it's headlined by Green Velvet and Claude VonStoke, with guest artists at a special TBA location in Brooklyn. But you won't want to wait to lock in your plans: Tickets are selling out fast, so you should act now if you're looking to get down with some of today's hottest house music. **Dec. 29, 10 p.m., location TBA, $40, mean.red**

PROVIDED

COMEDY

Competitive Erotic Fan Fiction

Comedians try their hand at writing filthy fan fiction onstage during the quarterly Competitive Erotic Fan Fiction at Union Hall. Host Bryan Cook brings the popular live show back to NYC next week with guest comics Josh Gondelman, Jo Firestone, Sam Morril, Mike Lebovitz, Eli Sairs and Eli Yudin. **Dec. 27, 8 p.m., 702 Union St., Brooklyn, $10, unionhallny.com**

NEW YEAR NEW YOU

Good Riddance Day

A cleansing fire may not be in the cards, but there's a totally legal way to purge your 2016 grudges. Head to Times Square for this annual "ceremony" inspired by a Latin American tradition, where you write your bad memories on sheets of paper, then watch as it's destroyed in the maw of a Shred-it. Or if you'd like to get more physical, there's a mat to smash small mementos that are taking up literal and mental space in your life. Make way for good mojo! **Dec. 28, noon-1 p.m., free, timessquarenyc.org**

HOLIDAYS

Kwanzaa Celebration

The Apollo welcomes Kwanzaa with traditional music and dance for a 10th year. Hosted by radio funnyman Imhotep Gary Byrd, you'll be treated to ballet and more by Abdel Salaam's Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, which is also using the event to celebrate its 35th anniversary. The performance highlights Kwanzaa themes of family, community and culture.
Dec. 31, 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m., 253 W. 125th St., $14-$35, apollotheater.org

T. MICHELLE MURPHY

Shoulder Arthritis Treatments Keeping Boomers Active Into Their 60's, 70's Even 80's?

If you suffer with painful shoulder arthritis – science may have finally found the answer you've been looking for.

Here is why: Researchers have discovered an natural gel like medicine that is like "joint oil." This all-natural gel is one of the naturally occurring lubricating substances in your shoulder joint that cushions and lubricates the joint which dries out over time due to wear-and-tear, age or injury. But when doctors precisely place this lubricating gel into your shoulder joint by using advanced digital imaging technology – it is like putting oil on a rusty door hinge. It lubricates the joint and can decrease pain and stiffness. For some, results can be dramatic and last for months. Years for some. Often times shoulder surgery can be avoided.

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Discover Georgia

The country, that is. GETTY IMAGES

This under-the-radar charmer boasts unique culture and attractions.

Fodor's Travel

Georgia is so far off the tourist track that if you mention you're headed there, you'll probably get an earful on peaches and Savannah, not the tiny country sandwiched between Europe and Asia that shares the same name. But now more than ever, in-the-know travelers are buzzing about its many unsung attractions: glaciated peaks that dwarf the Alps, mysterious cave cities hewn into mountainsides and amber wines that the world's top sommeliers can't stop talking about. To seal the deal, Georgia is affordable these days — half-the-price-of-Europe affordable — which means there's no better time to catch a flight to the Caucasus.

Breathtaking mountains

Although Georgia is smaller than South Carolina, four of Europe's 10 tallest mountains can be found there, and on a clear day, you can see snowy peaks from almost anywhere in the country. Well-marked trails and affordable mountaineering packages draw alpinists, both amateur and expert, from around the world. But you don't need to lace up your hiking boots to make the most of the Caucasus. Consider galloping on horseback through mountain passes at Zeta Camp, hiking to Chaladi Glacier in Mestia, whitewater rafting in Borjomi or off-road driving in Tusheti with Inter Georgia Travel.

East-meets-West cuisine

For centuries, Georgia occupied a strategic location along the Silk Road that linked China to the Mediterranean, and as merchants passed through the Caucasus, Georgia's culinary repertoire broadened to adopt ingredients and techniques from both continents. Most meals start with a Mediterranean-style cucumber and tomato salad drizzled with oil. But then the pendulum might swing East with a dish like khinkali, soup dumplings with fenugreek-spiced filling. Then India might spring to mind as you tear off a piece of shotis puri, a naanlike bread baked to chewy perfection on the walls of a tandoor. But certain flavors are unmistakably Georgian, like walnut-thickened stews, grassy sulguni cheese or puckering tkemali, an addictive plum compote that's an ideal counterpoint to grilled meats.

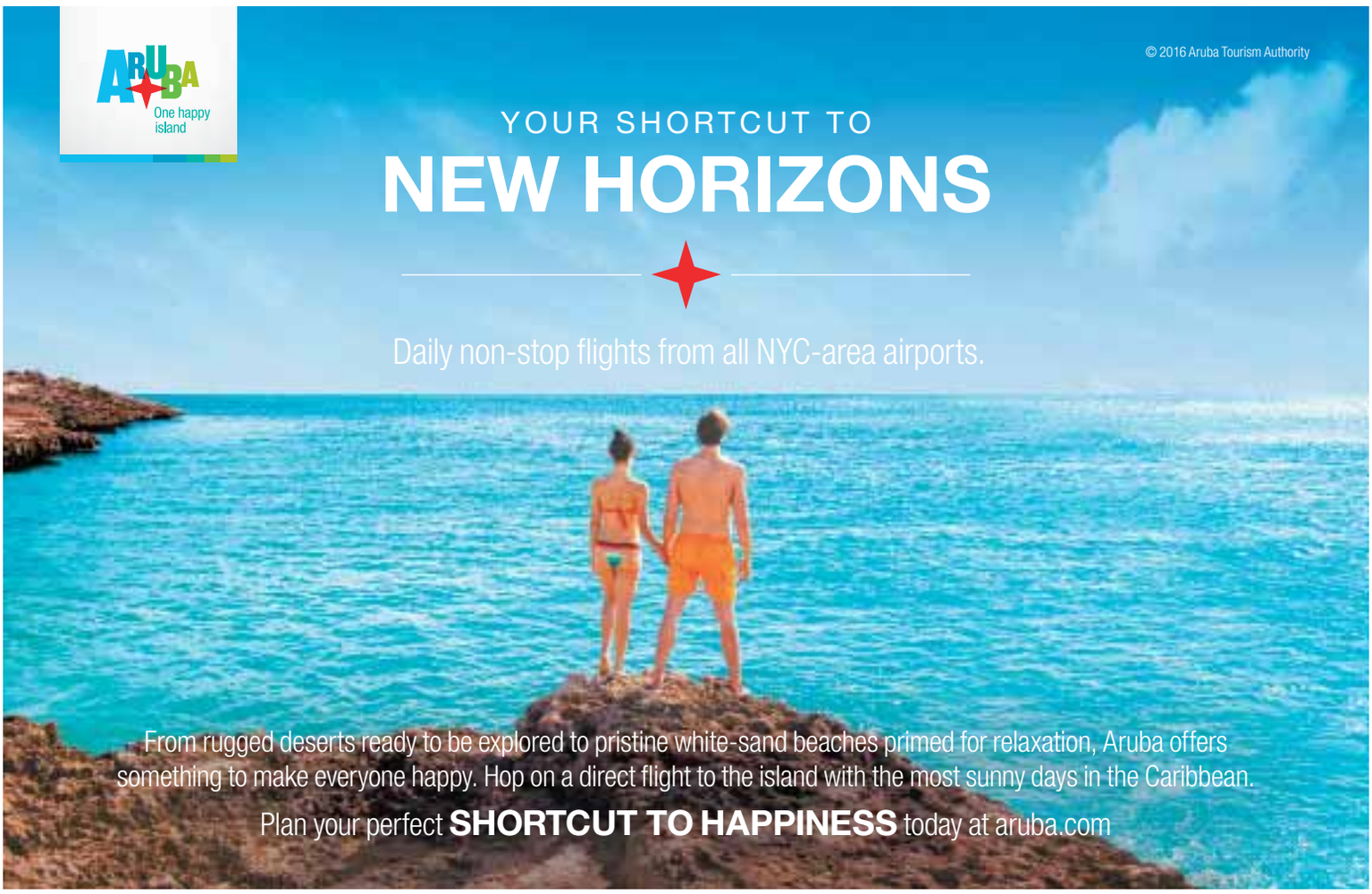
Polyphonic folk music

Complex harmonies are not reserved for concert halls in Georgia; you're just as likely to hear a spellbinding performance around a dinner table. These polyphonic folk songs can be lively or somber, depending on the mood, but the stories they tell chronicle the nation's precious oral history from pre-Christian times to the present. There's a terrific little ensemble called Zedashe that's worth seeking out; if their tour dates don't align with your schedule, they sometimes have impromptu jam sessions at Pheasant's Tears winery in Sighnaghi.

Seaside towns

Georgia may be known for its soaring peaks, but the oft-overlooked Black Sea coast is worth adding to the itinerary, particularly when it's

Continued on page 24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Continued from page 23

warm outside and the bars along the rocky beaches come to life. Batumi, the country's most popular resort, is the Las Vegas of Georgia — all neon lights, casinos and nightclubs. Tranquility is easier to find farther north in villages like Grigoleti, whose beaches of fine magnetic sand are said to be therapeutic for the bones and joints.

All of Tbilisi turns out for the Tbilisoba Arts Festival. VANO SHLAMOV, AFP

Prehistoric cave cities

Georgia is home to three major cave complexes: Uplistsikhe, Davit Gareja and Vardzia. The oldest, and closest to Tbilisi, is Uplistsikhe, dating back to the early Iron Age. Its twisty, irregular rock formations call to mind Gaudi's naturalist works. Farther east, the still-active Davit Gareja monastery complex, with colorful frescoes and desert views into neighboring Azerbaijan, is a more enriching experience, provided you have the better part of a day to spare (the Gareji Line is the most comfortable way to get there). Vardzia lies even farther afield, but its labyrinthine network of 235 chambers are awe-inspiring.

World-class museums

In 1991, a group of archaeologists excavating Dmanisi, in southern Georgia, uncovered the oldest human remains found in Eurasia to date. You can see the "1.8-million-year-old girl" at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi as part of the permanent collection, which also includes a trove of prehistoric jewelry and a thought-provoking exhibition on the Soviet occupation. For those who are especially curious about the latter, the Stalin Museum in Gori — his birthplace — offers excellent guided tours through immense collections of Communist-era paraphernalia, including Stalin's armored railway carriage.

Whirlwind dances

Focus on a Georgian dancer's legs as he's performing, and you may notice an unexpected adornment: kneepads. They come in handy in the Mtiuluri mountain dances that require the men to jump into the air, twirl around and land squarely on their knees. Equally spectacular are the ethereal Kartuli numbers, in which a female dancer glides across the stage in a large, billowy dress, creating the illusion of hovering. Sukhishvili National Ballet is the country's premier dance company, but if they're out of town (they usually are), don't fret: The choreography on display at Tsiskvili, a fine-dining restaurant on the outskirts of the capital, will keep you transfixed for an entire evening.

Fantastic skiing

Georgia is one of the world's best bargains when it comes to skiing and snowboarding. Altitudes here surpass those of the Alps, but at about $12 a day, lift tickets are a fraction of what you might pay Stateside or in Europe. There are six ski resorts in Georgia but Gudauri, located two hours north of Tbilisi, eclipses the competition with 35 miles of slopes to traverse. Its heli-ski tours, suitable for only the most intrepid athletes, give skiers the rare opportunity to barrel down a mountainside from 13,000 feet.

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3 Things to watch for when the Giants face the Eagles Thursday

On short rest, New York travels down the Jersey Turnpike to face the Eagles Thursday night.

KRISTIAN DYER
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Will the Giants turnover-happy secondary find a way to cause some mistakes from Eagles' Carson Wentz? GETTY IMAGES

A season of exceeded expectations can take a giant — pardon the pun — step on Thursday night if the New York Giants can beat the Philadelphia Eagles.

A win, and the Giants can essentially wrap up a playoff spot, a team that spent big this offseason to correct three straight years of 6-10 seasons now headed in the right direction. Win and the Giants would have win No. 11, a huge turnaround for a team that hasn't made the postseason since 2011.

Most impressive is that they are doing this with an impact player in defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul out for the rest of the regular season with a sports hernia injury.

The Eagles are 5-9, losers of five straight and a once promising season now doomed for the golf course rather than the playoffs. But this is a rivalry for New York, both geographically and on the field. It won't be an easy game for the Giants.

Three things to watch:

1 Continuing run momentum

It is a talking point seemingly every week for the Giants, but the running game, after being ground to a halt earlier this season, has picked up in recent weeks. In Sunday's win over the Detroit Lions, they topped triple digits as a unit, a rarity this season for a franchise that has always prided itself on running the ball well.

"The offensive line has been doing a tremendous job these past couple of weeks," rookie running back Paul Perkins said. "All the running backs have been continuing to improve."

The Eagles have had difficulties this year stopping the run, No. 21 in yards per attempt and No. 17 in yards allowed per game (104.9).

2 The turnover battle

Not terribly shocking but the Giants are 7-2 in games where quarterback Eli Manning has one or fewer interceptions. In Sunday's win, Manning didn't have a single turnover and while he didn't put up big numbers, his performance was efficient and at times clutch.

The Eagles have been relatively tidy this year with a plus-two turnover differential. They have 11 picks as a defense this season and are tied for seventh with 10 forced fumbles recovered.

3 Quick turnaround

The Giants won on Sunday, beating a team that appears playoff bound in the Lions, but the Eagles are coming off a bitter loss to the Baltimore Ravens. The quick turnaround of a Sunday game followed up by playing again on Thursday night should help the Eagles rebound, giving them very little time to lick their wounds.

For the Giants, the hope is that momentum of a hard-fought game can carry over.

"It's a divisional opponent. We know them and they know us. That helps and makes it very competitive. The challenges are trying to get the reps physically so guys can see it and take a look at it on their feet," Giants head coach Ben McAdoo said. "You want to be smart with how much they get on their feet. We will do some things and dial the speed down a little bit. We need to make sure we put our preparation in off the field, on the film as much as possible."

Lundqvist an undisputed constant for Rangers

From Day 1, there has been one consistent for Alain Vigneault in his tenure as head coach of the New York Rangers.

Henrik Lundqvist.

"This is the start of my fourth year," Vigneault said after the Rangers' 3-2 shootout win over the Devils Sunday night at the Garden. "As soon as I got here, I knew his preparation and his work ethic in practice. That's why he was one of the best goaltenders in the league at that time and he continues to be. He just works at his game; he's really focused, and he's a great person."

Following an overblown, pseudo-goalie controversy due to Vigneault replacing Lundqvist with Antti Raanta for four straight games, the Rangers' undisputed No. 1 goaltender has reclaimed his crease with a vengeance.

Lundqvist compiled a 3-0-0 record in three straight games between Dec. 15 and Dec. 18. In those games, he had a 0.98 goals against average, a 0.967 save percentage and a shutout.

"I saw the play happening pretty well throughout the three periods and overtime," Lundqvist said after he made 29 saves in the 65 minutes between regulation and overtime, then turned away three of four Devils shooters in the skills competition.

"A couple times they made some good moves and surprised me a little. In overtime it was wide open. There were a couple big chances. I'm not sure what I think about 3-on-3. Sometimes it's fun to watch but the structure and the way chances occur, it's hard to read sometimes. You just have to be out there and battle and kind of hope for the best."

Henrik Lundqvist is where he belongs, between the pipes for the Rangers. GETTY IMAGES

This stretch arose from an eight-game window in which Lundqvist went 3-4-1 with a 3.04 GAA and .902 save percentage between Nov. 18 and Dec. 6. After the 4-2 loss to the Islanders at Barclays Center on Dec. 6, Vigneault made the decision to start Raanta in the four games spanning Dec. 8-13. The Rangers went 3-1-0 in those four games, and Raanta compiled a 0.33 GAA and .984 save percentage.

Even coming off a 7-2 loss to the reigning Stanley Cup Champion Penguins in Pittsburgh Tuesday night, Raanta has constructed an 8-3-0 record with a 2.10 GAA, .930 save percentage and two shutouts in 14 games.

Essentially, Vigneault has quality goaltending with his starter and backup.

"We have to win as a team. That's what we've done basically since the beginning. Whether you want to call it balanced scoring, balanced defending, strong goaltending — we are built on a team basis," Vigneault said after the win over the Devils.

"At the beginning of the season, as everyone remembers, we were scoring in bunches. Right now we are scoring one to two goals a game. We are finding ways to win those games. That's the timely save, that's the making the high-percentage play, not forcing something that is not there.

"We have to continue to do it as a team and that's what we saw tonight."

DENIS GORMAN

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'TIS THE SEASON FOR NFL AND NBA ON CHRISTMAS

OPINION

SID ROSENBERG
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For some, the saying "'Tis the season to be jolly" rings true but it is not for all of us. Whether it's your recently divorced Uncle Tony or the cat lady who lives next door, everyone knows someone who dons the grumpiness of Ebenezer Scrooge at this time of year. But this year there should be no reason to be grouchy around the holidays because for the first time since 2011 we will have football on Christmas to go along with the usual wall-to-wall NBA action.

That's right, for the first time in five years the NFL will play not one but two games on Christmas Day as the Ravens take on the Steelers and the Broncos play the Colts.

So with the holiday season in full swing, what better therapy is there than to reminisce some of the more memorable sports moments that occurred during this festive time in December.

On Dec. 19, 2010, the Philadelphia Eagles got an early Christmas present when they played the Giants in what is now referred to as "The Miracle at the New Meadowlands." The Eagles looked all but dead in the swamps of New Jersey, down 21 points with eight minutes left in the fourth quarter when the wheels fell off for the Giants. Philadelphia scored 21 unanswered points and then DeSean Jackson put the nail in the coffin with one of the greatest punt returns in NFL history as time expired capping off a 28 point fourth quarter en route to the 38-31 victory.

The NBA has always made Christmas Day one of the biggest attractions for fans during the season. In recent years the NBA has had a full slate of games on Dec. 25 and some are games that we may never forget.

The holiday season also had some highlights from the sideline. Christmas Day marked the day some of the greatest coaches in their respective sports got legendary wins. In December 25th 1994, NFL Hall of Fame coach Don Shula passed George Halas for the most regular season wins (319) with the Miami Dolphins 27-20 victory over the Barry Sanders-led Detroit Lions. Similarly, one of the NBA's greatest coaches, Phil Jackson, got a milestone present on Christmas Day 2008. In one of the most anticipated NBA Finals rematches in recent history, Jackson's Lakers squared off against the reigning NBA champion Boston Celtics, who entered the game on 19 game winning streak. Well, the Celtics winning streak didn't make it to 20 as the Lakers beat the Celtics, 92-83, in what marked Jackson's 1,000th career victory.

Happy Holidays!

Christmas is coming ... well, on Christmas for NFL fans this year. **GETTY IMAGES**

"For the first time in five years the NFL will play ... two games on Christmas."

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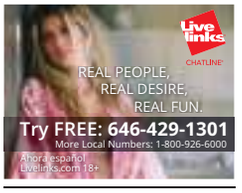

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metro.us/games

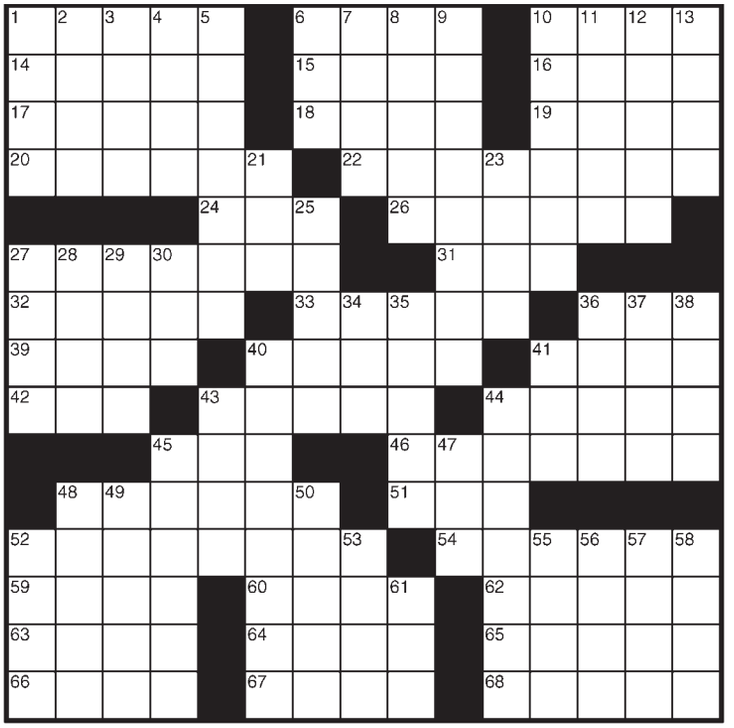
metro.us/crossword

Across

1 Abbot's underling
6 -- nelson
10 Auntie of fiction
14 Maureen of the screen
15 Horror-film servant
16 Lemony
17 Washington waterway
18 Franc's replacer
19 Singer -- Hendryx
20 Polished
22 Wavelength unit
24 Size above med.
26 Trip to the top
27 Apples or potatoes
31 Sidekick
32 Priggish
33 Bwana, in India
36 Consumer org.
39 Hop, skip or jump
40 Ruffly front
41 Corrida sight
42 Frat letter
43 Type of canoe
44 Slinky toy shape
45 Dickens
46 Green science
48 Dirty politics
51 Bottom line
52 Joking around
54 Crown
59 Costa --
60 Footnote abbr. (2 wds.)
62 Title role for Madonna
63 FitzGerald's poet
64 Baja Ms.
65 Splinter groups
66 Volcano goddess
67 Bristle with
68 Buy a round

Down

1 Firecracker noises
2 Baba au --
3 "Othello" heavy
4 Black-and-white snack
5 Clanked
6 Hotfoot it
7 Water, in Madrid
8 "-- Doone"
9 Pond algae (2 wds.)
10 Fireplace ledge
11 Kind of squash
12 North Dakota city
13 Party-tray cheese
21 Elev.
23 Nature's bandage
25 Dryden work
27 Host's plea
28 Sporty trucks
29 Graceful wrap
30 Bro or sis
34 Org. for lawyers
35 Phonies it up
36 String tie
37 Tar's jug
38 Too squared off
40 Flashiest
41 Util. bill
43 Zen riddle
44 Most cozy
45 Obey a caveat
47 Heifer's mouthful
48 Slug's trail
49 Slow train
50 -- nous
52 Riding whip
53 Concert proceeds
55 Maintain
56 Mince
57 Singer James
58 Sail support
61 Take it on the --



metro.us/sudoku

easy

		9			5			
				7	4	5	6	3
				6		7		9
	7		8	4		2		
9				1				7
		4		3	7		8	
4		3		8				
8	2	1	4	9				
			2			3		

hard

7	3		2	5				4
5	1		7				9	
				3	9			5
	2					1		8
1		4					2	
4			8	9				
	6				1		3	9
9				2	6		8	1

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Make romance, health and children your priorities. Your actions will be what counts when it comes to your personal life. Don't take on unnecessary responsibilities.

Taurus Don't feel the need to take on too much responsibility over the holiday season. You owe it to your family to spend some downtime with them.

Gemini Tie up unfinished business. Stay focused on building strong relationships with the people who can influence your future. Make romance a priority.

Cancer Socializing with friends is encouraged, as long as you aren't indulgent. A discussion with a personal or professional partner will turn sour.

Leo Do something special. Make travel plans or engage in something unique that will enlighten you and bring you closer to making an important decision.

Virgo Take care of any year-end tasks that an older relative is having trouble doing. It will end up being fulfilling for you, and the thanks you receive will be worth your while.

Libra Keep your life simple and refuse to overspend just to appease someone. You cannot buy love or forgiveness. Truth and genuine concern will win someone over.

Scorpio Offering your time to help a cause you believe in is fine, but don't feel you have to pay for others' problems or mistakes. Charity begins at home.

Sagittarius Make changes at home that will add to the year-end festivities. Aim to bring joy to the people you love through gestures of kindness and small offers of gratitude.

Capricorn Moderation will be important. Whether shopping, socializing or engaging in robust conversation, keep in mind that life is simple until one opts to make it complex.

Aquarius A personal change will turn out better than anticipated. Make preparations that will help you head in the best direction possible. Express your feelings.

Pisces You can mix business with pleasure in order to form better alliances. Engaging in open discussion will help you advance.

EUGENIA LAST

Yesterday's answers

Z	I	N	C	■	C	B	E	R	■	P	A	T	C	H
E	M	I	R	■	A	E	R	O	■	A	L	B	E	E
R	A	C	E	■	L	E	A	D	■	S	C	A	N	S
O	N	E	S	E	L	F	■	E	S	C	O	R	T	S
■	■	■	T	R	U	S	T	■	A	A	H	■	■	■
L	I	K	E	N	S	■	O	F	F	L	O	A	D	S
A	S	I	D	E	■	T	R	E	E	■	L	U	R	E
M	A	D	■	S	C	E	N	E	R	Y	■	D	O	W
B	A	D	E	■	H	E	A	D	■	O	L	I	V	E
S	C	O	T	L	A	N	D	■	S	K	A	T	E	D
■	■	■	A	L	I	■	O	P	T	E	D	■	■	■
S	L	O	G	A	N	S	■	L	I	L	Y	P	A	D
H	A	R	E	M	■	O	V	A	L	■	B	A	L	E
O	P	E	R	A	■	R	E	T	E	■	U	R	A	L
E	S	S	E	S	■	E	X	E	S	■	G	E	N	E

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